

GREETINGS FRIENDS!

My name is Suna, and I have been instructed to tell you more about Iceland. I'm writing this letter to you at 11 PM from a park near my house in the town of Akureyri, which is in northern Iceland. There are no lights in the park, nor do I have a flashlight. I can write this letter because in the summertime the sun sets at 1 AM! Then it rises an hour later. Isn't that amazing?



Iceland, the second largest island in Europe, lies close to the Arctic Circle. It is about midway between New York and Moscow.

Iceland is a relatively new island that has not been around very long compared to other landforms on Earth. When you see how unique and different our blend of landscapes is, you'll see why Iceland is such a popular tourist attraction.

So, where should I start on this overview of my home country? First, there's the wide variety of plant species in gardens around Akureyri. It may seem like a small town to most Americans because there are only 15,000 people, but it is the second largest city in Iceland after Reykjavik, the capital. Akureyri, which is only a few miles from the Arctic circle, is one of the northernmost cities in the world! And just

because we're so far north doesn't mean we don't grow crops. There are kilometers of rich farmland up here, especially in the southern and southwestern regions of Iceland. Also, few children grow up in Iceland without becoming very good at fishing. Just ask my younger brother Henrik, who is so good at fishing that my parents said that they don't need to go to the market anymore!

In the south are glaciers such as Vatnajökull ("water glacier"), which is Europe's largest glacier! It is in southeastern Iceland, rising over 2,000 m (6560 ft) and covering an area of 8,538 square km. That's the size of Rhode Island. Sometimes, the ice can be 1,000 meters thick – that's over half a mile! We use snowmobiles to get to the glacier (since it is impossible to build roads in the surrounding



With snow scooters or a caterpillar you can make a trip on the glaciers, with a guide of course. Driving in this vast, white world, which was for a long time the only way from the coast here to other parts of Iceland, is great.

<http://www.bamjam.net/Iceland/jokull.html>

Iceland

areas), but it's a good experience. Have you ever driven a snowmobile? I do it all the time! I drive Henrik to school every day on the snowmobile.

If you are interested, we have many active volcanoes in the area. But don't expect to see the kinds of volcanoes that you're used to seeing in movies. Most of these volcanoes erupt under the ice. Iceland is truly a land of fire and ice. These volcanoes are mostly concentrated in the uninhabited center of the country and roughly line up in a north-south direction. Rapidly flowing mixtures of water, ice, and rocks result from volcanic eruptions; they are very dangerous and destroy everything in their path!



A geyser hot spring erupts.

http://ffden-2.phys.uaf.edu/home/home.dir/iceland_home/06.29.2002.html

Have you ever heard of "Old Faithful?" Well, we have hot springs and geysers, too. Besides being an interesting sight and a tourist attraction, the Icelandic hot springs are a source of power and energy for Iceland's natives. We don't use fossil fuels or gasoline to heat our homes and cook our food. Instead, all of our energy comes from heat-producing underground processes. And believe me, you'd need plenty of energy to keep warm in the long, cold winters here!

Iceland is almost completely made up of lava flows. New land is added to the island when all the underwater volcanic activity deposits material onto the ocean floor, eventually piling up to reach above the water surface and adding to our country's total surface area. You can imagine how the island of Iceland formed! In 1963, when an

underwater volcano exploded, it left behind a new island that we call Surtsey, after the Norse god of fire.

Landforms in Iceland are also constantly changing. In 1973, a huge volcanic explosion on the island of Heimaey forced an evacuation of 5,000 residents and caused unspeakable damage to the town. It wasn't until a year later that the volcano stopped activity and it was safe for residents to return to the island. When they returned, a new 2,240 m (735 ft) tall volcano was there to greet them! Imagine how surprised they all were.

Tourists also like to visit the many large lakes and rivers in the country. One of the best lakes is Lake Myvatn, which is near Akureyri. The region around Lake Myvatn has caves with hot



Lake Myvatn

http://www.noth.ch/imghtml/trav/t03021_f.html

springs. My older brother Markus serves as a tour guide for these exciting trips. Last summer, we both went there and had an amazing time.



A black sand beach in Iceland. The sand is black because the sand is volcanic rock.

<http://element.ess.ucla.edu/pictures/Iceland/cooked061.jpg>

Then there's Stokkseyri, which is a town in southern Iceland. It has a nice beach with BLACK sand! I bet there's not much of that where you guys live. When I went there two summers ago, I remember an American boy who was so fascinated by the color that he scooped a sample of the sand into a plastic bag!

You should also become familiar with things like fjords, which are a dime a dozen here. Fjords are long, narrow inlets of the sea that cut deeply into the high slopes. My hometown of Akureyri is located right on a fjord.

Earthquakes are also a daily occurrence here in Iceland. Hundreds

of earthquakes with magnitudes of at least 2.0 on the Richter scale occur every year in our country. All that volcanic activity causes the land to move and settle. The largest earthquake happened in 1784 and had a magnitude of 7.25!

If you ever come to Iceland, don't forget the camera because you'll see some of the most breathtaking natural scenery you'll ever lay eyes on!

Your pal,
Suna Ericsson
65°N 21°W